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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3833
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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5646
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 9445
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5551
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0486
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 4125
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SEOUL 000515

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [ECON](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#) [KS](#) [US](#)
SUBJECT: SEOUL - MEDIA REACTION

North Korea: DPRK, planned missile launch

"MISSILE MEASURES"

Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo editorialized (03/31): "The comments by U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates and President Lee reveal close cooperation between the ROK and the U.S., but we can't help harboring considerable concern about security. The attitude of the U.S., which frequently changes its stance, is not trustworthy. Above all, Secretary Gates will not be able to avoid criticism for his careless remarks on the missile issue... The ROKG should now come up with specific measures to dispel the ROK people's concern. It should even consider participating in the Missile Defense system more positively."

"DOES OBAMA HAVE A N. KOREA POLICY?"

Conservative Chosun Ilbo editorialized (03/31): "Judging from the situation so far, the U.S. administration appears to have decided it would be difficult to take any measures against a North Korean missile launch other than discussing it with the UN Security Council... This would be very disappointing for a large number of South Koreans and would spread the view among both North and South Koreans, as well as the international community, that the U.S. has no magic formula either. Fundamentally, it would exacerbate confusion and suspicion over the Obama administration's North Korea policy."

"TOLERATING N. KOREA'S PROVOCATION?"

Conservative Dong-a Ilbo editorialized (03/31): "The irresponsible responses by Seoul and Washington will inevitably cause serious side effects. Military experts warn that President Lee's comment has given the North the green light to launch its Taepodong-2 missile, enabling the North to comfortably make its provocations. The early retreat by Seoul and Washington also makes it difficult for the United Nations to impose strong sanctions on the North if a missile is launched. The toleration of the North's nuclear and missile development, it is feared, will torpedo the Nonproliferation Treaty and the Missile Technology Control Regime."

"PRESIDENT'S REALISTIC REMARKS ON N. KOREAN AFFAIR"

Left-leaning Hankyoreh Shinmun editorialized (03/31): "President Lee's statements during the interview with The Financial Times are meaningful as the President publicly opposed a military response and reaffirmed a moderate stance. Regarding the intention of Lee's remarks, government officials have explained that, 'It sent a message to North Korea that the South Korean government won't participate in playing a leading hard-line role to worsen the situation even if North Korea launches a satellite rocket.' Given concerns that a satellite launch by North Korea would spark a chain reaction and make the situation on the Korean Peninsula worse, we welcomed this message."

"SEOUL SHOULD ENHANCE DIPLOMATIC COORDINATION ON NORTH KOREAN MISSILE ISSUE"

Moderate Seoul Shinmun editorialized (03/31): "President Lee's statement [that he opposes a military response to North Korea's missile launch] can be seen as his efforts to dispel concerns about a military response and to make sure that North Korea's rocket launch will not become a stumbling block in the road to overcoming the economic crisis... Seoul should focus its diplomatic efforts on seeking cooperation with the U.S., Japan, China and Russia in reminding the North that its rocket launch and saber-rattling will never be beneficial to the communist state itself."

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Upcoming G-20 Summit

"BRIEF BUT SIGNIFICANT FIRST SUMMIT BETWEEN THE ROK AND THE U.S."

Moderate Hankook Ilbo editorialized (03/31): "During the summit to be held on the sidelines of the G-20 summit, the ROK and U.S. Presidents should work together to come up with effective measures against North Korea's launch of a long-range rocket. They should make North Korea pay the price for its behavior in defiance of international warnings, and at the same time, maintain the momentum of dialogue and negotiations at the level of the Korean Peninsula, such as the Six-Party Talks... We hope that the first meeting between Presidents Lee and Obama will serve as a good opportunity to build mutual trust, which is essential to resolving pending bilateral issues."

STEPHENS